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Health Department Offers Monkeypox Update

Monkeypox has become an important health issue and the Lake County Health Department/Community Health Center continues to keep residents informed. No human cases and no suspected cases have been reported in Lake County. Research thus far indicates that no resident in the county has purchased any of the infected prairie dogs.

"The Health Department is assuring residents the risk of developing monkeypox is low in Lake County," said Lake County Health Department Executive Director Dale Galassie.

"We are working closely with the Illinois Department of Public Health, the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the medical community to contain the outbreak."

There are currently 12 suspected cases and one confirmed case of monkeypox in Illinois.

Monkeypox is a rare viral disease found mostly in the rain forest countries of central and west Africa. First discovered in 1958, the disease is known to produce a smallpox-like illness in humans.

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In early June, first reports began to appear among several U.S. residents who became ill after having contact with infected prairie dogs. Concurrent public health investigations are ongoing in Wisconsin, Indiana, New Jersey, Ohio, Texas, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina. Other states are also on the lookout because of the unregulated sale of prairie dogs and Gambian rats. In humans, monkeypox is similar to smallpox, but not as acute or severe.

Monkeypox is known to be carried by Gambian rats, which are believed to have infected prairie dogs. This disease is believed to be passed from animal to person through bites or direct contact with their bodily fluids, such as blood. Previous studies have shown the rate of monkeypox transmission from person to person is low.

If you have purchased a prairie dog or a Gambian rat on or after April 15, contact the Health Department's Communicable Disease program at (847) 377-8130. The Health Department recommends checking the animal's condition. The signs and symptoms of a sick prairie dog or Gambian rat are:

- Skin bumps
- Blisters
- Pustules
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Eye discharge
- Nasal discharge
- Fever
- Respiratory distress

The IDPH is requesting the isolation of and minimizing contact with ill prairie dogs or Gambian rats. Do not take sick animals to the veterinarians or return them to the wild. If these signs or symptoms are seen in your prairie dog or Gambian rat, contact the Illinois Department of Agriculture hotline at (866) 427-7281.

Those who own or handled a prairie dog or Gambian rat on or after April 15 and start to feel sick should look for the following symptoms:

- Rash
- Fever
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Headache
- Backache
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

If you are experiencing any of the preceding symptoms after coming in contact with a prairie dog or Gambian rat, contact your physician and describe your symptoms and contact with the infected animal.

To find out more information, contact the Department of Agriculture hotline or view their website at <http://www.agr.state.il.us> or the IDPH website at <http://www.idph.state.il.us>.

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